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ABSTRACT

This study investigated 10-year trends of first-time-in-college (FTIC) and community college applicants to major public institutions in Florida, focusing on how an institution's geographic location affected applicant enrollment patterns. The investigation also examined the influence of geographic location on applicants applying to a single institution compared to those applying to multiple institutions. Data were obtained from Florida State University System master admissions files for the 1987, 1990, 1994, 1995, and 1996 cohorts of Florida applicants to the University of South Florida (USF), the University of Florida (UF), Florida State University (FSU), the University of Central Florida (UCF), and Florida Atlantic University (FAU). It was found that all applicants showed clear preferences for institutions from their home region and particularly their home county. In addition, the study showed that the steadily dropping applicant yields over the period resulted largely from increasing numbers of applicants applying to multiple institutions. This proved true even for institutions with state-wide missions, such as UF and FSU. It was also found that FTIC applicants were far more likely than community college applicants to apply to multiple institutions, and that location was more important to community college applicants than to FTIC applicants. (MDM)

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The Influence of Geographical Location and Application to Multiple Institutions on Recruitment

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Abstract

This study sought to determine where recruitment resources might best be invested for USF. Therefore it investigated 10 year trends of First Time in College (FTIC) and Community College applicants to major Florida public institutions. Two clear trends emerged: (1) all applicants show clear preferences for institutions from their home region and particularly their home county, and (2) the steadily dropping applicant yields during this time result largely from increasing percentages among applicants to multiple institutions, for whom all institutions have comparatively low yields. This proved true even for institutions with state-wide missions such as UF and FSU. However, such traditional research institutions, which have historically been located in comparatively small towns (e.g. Austin, TX; Gainesville, FL), often have small local populations from which to draw. As a result, they tend to effectively target their in-state recruiting toward both nearby population centers as well as toward more distant population centers, for example Miami, in Florida. The vast majority of Florida SUS applicants come from a few large counties (70% from nine). Therefore, because of higher yields, institutions located near such counties enjoy a competitive recruitment advantage. Such institutions also tend to fulfill a metropolitan mission which is usually reflected by somewhat lower admissions standards. FTIC applicants are far more likely than Community College students to apply to multiple institutions. Location is more important to Community College applicants than FTICs (more apply to home county schools).

Introduction

Findings from a recent study, (Wajeeh & Micceri, 1997) suggest that "geographic location" (proximity) is a primary motivating factor for students who choose to attend USF (The University of South Florida is a 34,000 student, 4-campus, public institution centered on Tampa Bay, Florida). This results at least partly from USF's mission as a Metropolitan University, to serve the educational needs of the local community. This study's primary purpose was to study the effect of an institution's geographical location on applicant enrollment patterns at public universities throughout Florida to determine whether USF's pattern was matched at all SUS institutions.

Because resources are scarce, this research attempted to determine where in the state of Florida USF might be able to realize the greatest gains by increasing recruiting efforts. Historical analyses indicate that numerous FTIC applicants to USF (about 60%) also apply to another SUS institution, most frequently to one of the following primary competitors: The University of Florida (UF), The Florida State University (FSU), The University of Central Florida (UCF), and Florida Atlantic University (FAU). This is particularly important, because all institutions, of necessity, enroll fewer from among those who submit multiple applications than from those who apply to only one institution. Therefore, an investigation of whether geographical location influenced applicants to one institution differently from applicants to more than one institution (dual applicants) was also conducted. Because more of USF's new degree-seeking students come from the Florida Community College ranks than directly from high school (FTIC), these students application patterns and yields were also investigated.

Methods

Sample Data came from The Florida State University System (SUS) Master Admissions Files for the 1987, 1990, 1994, 1995 and 1996 cohorts of Florida applicants to the five institutions noted. Geographical regions were defined by proximity to seven SUS institutions. The regions are designated herein by the nearest institution's acronym (UF – University of Florida; FSU, Florida State University;; FAU, Florida Atlantic University; UCF, University of Central Florida; USF, University of South Florida; UNF, University of North Florida; UWF, University of West Florida. FAMU and FSU share a region, as do FAU and FIU. Two mutually exclusive application groups were: dual applicants - who applied to more than one SUS institution, and single-institution applicants - who applied to only one SUS institution. Applicants were either accepted or denied by specific institutions. Accepted applicants either enroll or decline an institution's offer. Yields were defined in two ways (1) number enrolled divided by number accepted, and (2) number enrolled divided by number applied. Variables were compared within region, across regions and between dual and single-institution applicants.

Results and Discussion

FTIC - Applicant Numbers, Types and Locations

Regarding FTIC applicants' geographical location (source counties and regions), among 20,447 1996 SUS applicants, 38% came from FAU's (& FIU) region (the Miami area), 14% from USF's region (Tampa Bay), 12.2% from UCF's region (Orlando), and 5.5% from UNF's region (Jacksonville). In fact, 70% of all applicants came from Florida's nine most populous counties. The remaining 30% spread throughout the remainder of the state, with somewhat larger groups coming from areas with larger cities, such as Pensacola.

Table 1 shows that for institutions located in areas with small populations and having state-wide missions (UF and FSU), only about 5% of FTIC applicants come from their home region (shaded). However, for institutions located in more populous counties and with metropolitan missions, these percentages are substantially higher ranging from 29% for UCF to 81% for FAU. Clearly, regions having large populations are recruited heavily by all institutions. This is particularly true for the south Florida region (FAU), where 26% (for USF) is lowest percent of applicants from that region for any of the five institutions.

Table 1

Percent of FTIC Applicants by Region and Institution - 1996 Cohort

Region	USF	UF	FSU	UCF	FAU
UF	2%	**5%**	3%	3%	1%
FAU	26%	37%	39%	33%	**81%**
FSU	1%	2%	**5%**	1%	0%
UCF	14%	18%	16%	**29%**	6%
UNF	3%	8%	9%	5%	2%
USF	**53%**	26%	24%	27%	9%
UWF	1%	4%	5%	1%	0%

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Table 2 shows changes in the percent of FTIC applicants to these five institutions from 1987 to 1996 by applicant type (dual or single institution). These data show several relatively consistent changes that occurred for all SUS institutions between 1987 and 1996.

- All five institutions received substantially more applications from Florida High School graduates in 1996 than in 1987 (between 21% more for UF and 162% more for UCF).
- All three of the "more established" institutions (UF, FSU & USF) experienced smaller increases than did the "younger" institutions (UCF & FAU).
- All five institutions experienced a substantially greater increase in Dual Applicants (from UF's 56% to UCF's 272%) than in Single Institution Applicants (UF actually experienced a 10% decrease in Single Institution Applicants).

All five institutions experienced rather large increases in their percentage of Dual Applicants between 1987 and 1990 followed by considerably smaller increases thereafter.

Only FAU experienced more than 100% growth in Single Institution applicants during this time, because her home region has experienced considerably greater growth than others.

Table 2

Growth in Applicant Numbers by Type Among Major Competitors – 1987 - 1996

	USF	UF	FSU	UCF	FAU
All Applicants	58%	21%	44%	162%	139%
Dual Applicants	85%	56%	71%	272%	164%
Single Institution Applicants	28%	-10%	8%	66%	113%
Increase in Percent of Dual Applicants	9%	14%	11%	20%	5%

Table 3 shows that for all institutions, yields in the home region are higher than are overall yields, and yields for dual applicants are substantially lower than for single-institution applicants. These same phenomena occurred for all years between 1987 and 1996. Note that yields among applicants from outside the home regions are lower than for all, but in some years their numbers (particularly for FAU) were too small to generate reliable statistics.

Table 3

Yields of Accepted Applicants by Type of Applicant and Applicant Location - 1996

Source	USF	UF	FSU	UCF	FAU
Dual Applicants					
Home	35.80%	27.30%	34.00%	32.70%	37.80%
All	21.40%	22.80%	21.20%	20.10%	26.70%
Single Institution Applicants					
Home	55.60%	50.00%	53.80%	42.10%	49.20%
All	45.90%	40.40%	34.40%	36.60%	42.60%

Table 4 shows that all institutions except FAU experienced dropping yield rates of students between 1987 and 1996. Over this time, yield rates within applicant types have not changed substantially. It is largely the increase in portion of an applicant pool that lower-yield dual applicants make up that has driven overall yields down. Unfortunately, these yield drops tend to produce the following questions: "What is wrong with our recruitment???" and all too often the erroneous conclusions: "Our admissions office is failing!!!" "We have to recruit more students!!!" "Hire someone new who can get the job done!!!"

Table 4

Overall Florida Applicant FTIC Yield Rates by Institution - 1987 to 1996

	1996	1995	1994	1990	1987	Difference 1987-1996
USF	31.1%	28.9%	27.7%	30.2%	35.0%	-3.9%
UF	30.8%	34.5%	31.7%	31.4%	33.9%	-3.1%
FSU	26.1%	26.3%	28.6%	27.4%	29.9%	-3.9%
UCF	25.6%	27.1%	30.8%	26.4%	35.9%	-10.3%
FAU	33.0%	31.1%	33.4%	24.6%	24.3%	8.7%

Florida Community College Transfers Numbers, Types and Locations

Two primary differences exist between Florida SUS Community College applicants and FTIC applicants:

- Dual Applicants make up a far smaller percentage of Florida Community College applicants than of Florida FTIC applicants, and
- Community College Dual Applicant percentages have shown none of the growth that FTIC applicants have over the past 10-years. In fact, for all institutions considered except UCF, dual applicant percentages have declined.

Other than these two effects, Community College applicant yields and effects are quite similar to those among FTIC students, with higher yields and greater numbers of applicants from home counties. Note that only fall semester applicants are considered in this study, which accounts for approximately 85% of FTIC applicants, but only about 65% of Community College applicants.

Table 5

Florida Fall Semester Community College Applicants to Five SUS Institutions

	USF	UF	FSU	UCF	FAU
Number of Fall Applicants	2,811	2,547	1,973	3,829	1,834
Percent Dual Applicants	16.6%	35.7%	31.3%	17.9%	19.7%
Change in Percent of Dual Applicants (1987 to 1996)	-4.3%	-1.0%	-1.6%	0.0%	-3.9%

Table 6 shows that for Community College applicants, like for FTIC applicants (Table 3), for all institutions, yields of both single institution and dual applicants are higher in the home

counties that overall. Note that for USF, yields among single-institution applicants approach what may almost be a maximum (over 70%) for both those from the home region and from other regions in the state.

Table 6

Community College Yields by Home Region for Dual and Single-institution Applicants 1996

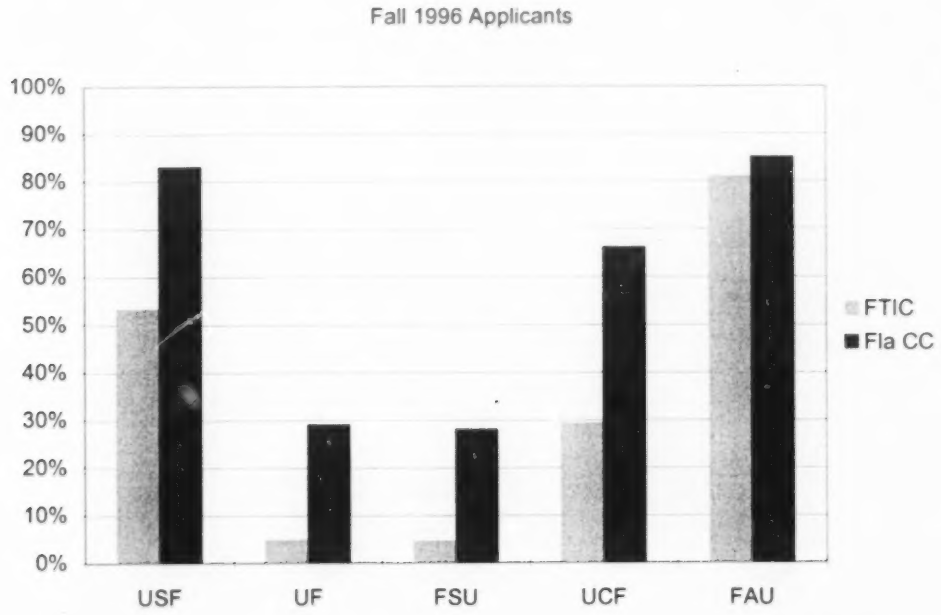
Source	USF	UF	FSU	UCF	FAU
Dual Applicants					
Home	55.40%	38.90%	45.50%	51.10%	48.50%
All	35.50%	22.60%	30.00%	35.10%	38.80%
Single Institution Applicants					
Home	74.00%	64.00%	72.50%	65.40%	75.90%
All	73.80%	55.00%	64.70%	64.90%	71.80%

Home Region Percent of Overall Applicants

Figure 1 shows that a far greater percentage of an institution's Community College applicants come from their home region as compared to FTIC applicants, and that this is particularly true for the two institutions (UF, FSU) having a state-wide mission. FAU receives 80% or more of all applicant types from her populous home region. USF receives over 80% of Community College applicants, but only 53% of FTIC applicants. UCF coming from a slightly smaller area (Orlando), shows similar but lower trends in both cases (66%,30%).

Figure 1

Percent of All Applicants by Type from Institutions' Home Region



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Conclusions

These data indicate that:

- Applicants, both FTIC and from Community Colleges, show enrollment preferences for institutions from their home counties or regions. Even the state's Flagship University (UF), although quite successful in outside regions, yields better in its home region.
- All institutions have lower yields in all places among applicants to multiple institutions (dual applicants) than among applicants to one institution.
- Among FTIC applicants, during the period under study, the portion of every institution's applicant pool made up of dual applicants increased. As a result of greater percentages of lower-yield dual applicants, institutional overall yield rates necessarily dropped.
- Location near a populous area appears to provide a recruitment advantage for Florida SUS institutions. Note particularly FAU (81% of all applicants from local region) and USF (53%).
- Greater percentages of higher-yield single-institution applicants come from home counties and regions for all institutions, among both FTIC and Community College applicants.

These results appear to support the following recruiting strategies:

- Emphasize recruitment as close to home as possible, where yields are high.
- Consider careful targeting of financial aid or special programs toward desired applicants to reduce loss to competing institutions.

References

Wajeeh, E. & Micceri, T. (1997). Factors Influencing Students' College Choice at Traditional and Metropolitan Universities. Paper presented at the AIR Annual Forum, Orlando, FL, May 1997.

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